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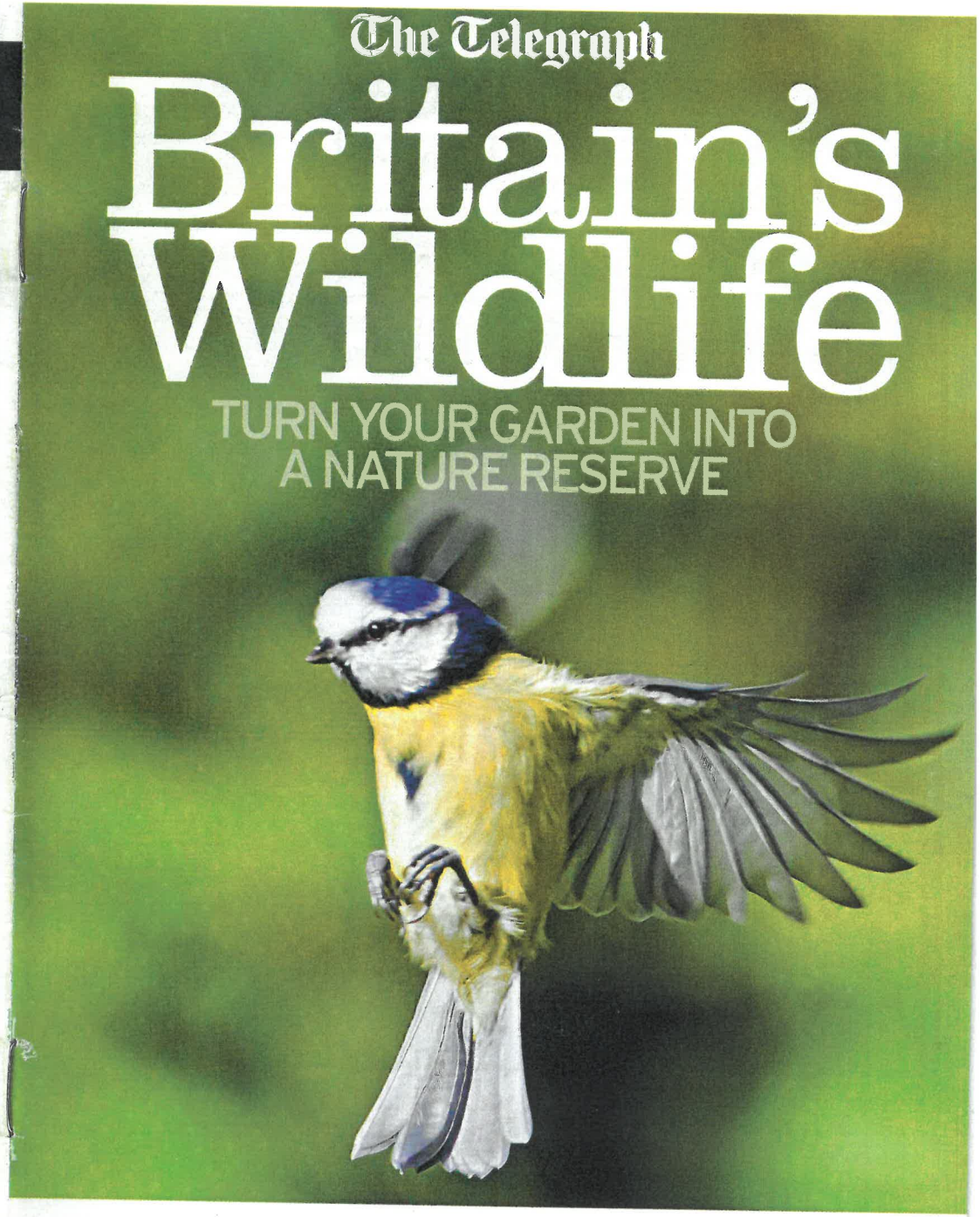
# Britain's Wildlife

## TURN YOUR GARDEN INTO A NATURE RESERVE



In association with RSPB

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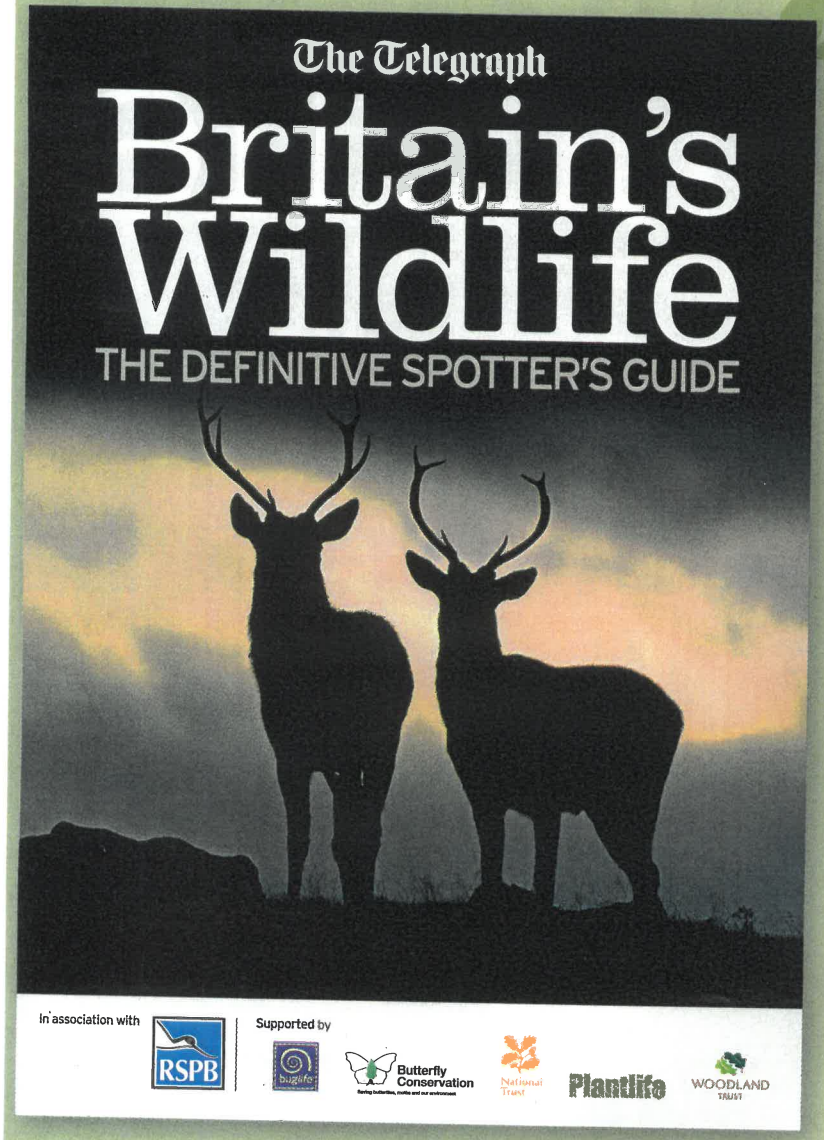


Don't miss your 40-page wildlife spotter's guide

With buildings and roads covering more than a tenth of the UK and millions more houses planned, there is a greater need than ever for our gardens and homes to provide wildlife with a vital refuge.

It doesn't matter how small your plot is: think of it as part of a jigsaw of gardens, which together make up an area bigger than all the wildlife reserves and national parks in Britain. Our wildlife doesn't see boundaries as we do – the other side of the fence is just another part of their habitat, so you can make a real difference whether you have a balcony or an acre.

Provide food, water and shelter – think hedges, compost heaps, ponds and a range of flowering and fragrant shrubs – and you'll be rewarded with all kinds of wonderful summer visitors, from bees and butterflies to hedgehogs and frogs.

Already you'll see birds foraging in your garden among the shoots, buds and brave, early primroses as they stock up on the food for the winter nights still ahead.

Hopefully a cheeky house sparrow, an acrobatic blue tit or a gregarious robin will spur you on to make your garden the perfect wildlife haven for the rest of the year. You'll find plenty of tips in this booklet, as well as further inspiration at www.rspb.org.uk/hfw.

KATE HUMBLE

*PS Don't miss tomorrow's wildlife spotter's guide, free with The Sunday Telegraph.*

## Contents


### Creating a wildlife-friendly garden

4 Planning your planting
8 Lawns for wildlife
10 Ponds for wildlife
12 Dead wood for wildlife
14 Recommended flowering plants
16 Recommended shrubs
17 Recommended climbers
18 Recommended trees
20 Garden hedges
21 Vegetable plots

### Homes for wildlife

22 Bats
23 Hedgehogs
24 Insects
26 Birds

### Wildlife A-Z

28 Your indispensable guide to the species that you'll see in your wildlife garden.



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The RSPB **www.rspb.org.uk**
The Woodland Trust **visitwoods.org.uk**

# Creating a wildlife-friendly garden

**A good wildlife garden is more than just a corner of a garden left to go wild. Whether you are creating a new wildlife garden, or have an established one, think of it as your very own nature reserve, of which you are the warden.**

The key ingredients are somewhere for animals to breed and shelter, and somewhere for them to forage and feed. A lawn, trees and shrubs, flowers and water are key habitats for these needs, and you should look to create microhabitats within these areas.

Provide as many habitats as possible, but avoid cramming too much in; focus on what can be done well in the space available.

Soil type, drainage and climatic conditions play a big part in what can grow in your garden. If you are creating a new garden, look at what grows locally in the wild and in neighbouring gardens for ideas.

*If you have areas of long grass, plan in some wildflowers*

# Planning your planting

**When creating a wildlife garden you can spread the work over several months, or even a few years.**

Sketch your ideas on paper, marking where shrubs and larger flowers might go. Experiment with wavy, curved or oval boundaries to provide a more natural habitat. Make your borders as large as possible and retain existing features and plants where you can.

## CHOOSING PLANTS

Find out what type of soil your garden has and where the sunny and shady areas are. Select plants that require similar conditions – those thriving locally, or in your garden, will give you a good guide.

Think about foliage as well as flowers – try to include leaves of different colours, shapes and textures, and mix evergreens with deciduous plants.

Incorporate different species of tree, shrub and flowering plants to provide nectar and attract other food sources, such as insects, throughout the year.

- Early- and late-flowering plants yield nectar for insects at critical times – just after emergence or prior to hibernation.
- Ivy is a source of autumn nectar for insects and late winter fruit for birds.
- Fruiting bushes are a good source of food for birds and mammals during the autumn and part of the winter.
- Annual plants that produce seeds in late summer will feed birds through autumn into winter. Tidy shrubs and borders in winter or early spring to help retain seeds.
- Not all ornamental plants will produce fruit, but may be useful in other ways. Varieties susceptible to insect attack are valuable to birds and other insects, which feed on the offending pest.
- Many plants take a while to mature. For example, you are not likely to see a song thrush feeding on ivy berries for at least five years.
- Shrubs, trees and climbers can disguise bare walls or sheds and create an attractive backdrop for lower level planting in front.
- Climbers can be managed to provide dense growth at low levels.
- Plant lower growing shrubs such as lavender, hebe and senecio towards the front of beds, and leave them room to spread. Fill spaces with herbaceous perennials, bulbs, biennials and annuals. These provide ground cover for birds and attract a variety of insects.

*Fruiting bushes are a good source of autumn and early-winter food for birds and mammals*

*Plant spring bulbs between October and December, before the first frost*

- Long grass is the ideal place to plan in areas of wildflowers. It provides a habitat for many insects to lay eggs, and for the overwintering of caterpillars and leatherjackets (cranefly grubs). Blackbirds and starlings search for leatherjackets in short grass.
- Annuals such as poppies or forget-me-nots will self-seed. You could allow some discrete patches of wild annual plants such as groundsel or meadow grass to remain, or sow wild arable flowers such as corn cockle and corn marigold.

**TIP** Planting before Christmas ensures better rooting and growth because the soil is warmer.

## PREPARING FOR PLANTING

Trees, shrubs and bare-rooted herbaceous plants should be planted, or transplanted, between November and March.

Prepare new beds and borders during late summer and early autumn. You can plant through the winter, except when the ground is frozen or too wet.

- Skim off turf with a spade and pile it in a corner where it can be left to rot down to form loam. Alternatively, dig two spades' depth and bury the turf upside down in the trench before covering over. This will introduce organic matter into the soil.
- Before planting, prepare the ground. Mark out the area with pegs and string, or use a trickle of sand, then clear grass and weeds.
- Covering the proposed borders with black sheeting during the summer will suppress any grass or weeds.
- Clay soils are the hardest to dig, but they will remain fertile once you have improved the structure by digging in well-rotted manure or organic compost.
- All soils will benefit from the addition of compost. Try to find organically produced products.

## SUSTAINABLE GARDENING

Many of our actions have an impact on wildlife beyond our gardens. Consider this when choosing or using materials to create your wildlife garden.

- Save rainwater in a water butt for watering your garden. You can also put the contents of your washing-up bowl on your plants – any soap in the water will act as a wildlife-friendly aphid-repellent.
- Top up your pond only when necessary. Most pond plants can cope with moderate water-level variations in summer and certain insects actually benefit from them. If levels drop too low, replenish with supplies from a water barrel in preference to mains water, which is likely to encourage algal blooms.
- Compost organic matter such as grass and shrub cuttings and kitchen scraps to provide natural fertiliser.

*Dead leaf matter is a free, natural mulch*

*A water butt collects rainwater from the roof and gives you a fresh water supply*

- Use autumn leaves as a mulch to fertilise soil around plants
- Avoid using peat and use alternative forms of compost – peat extraction destroys vital wildlife habitats.
- When planting native plants, ensure they are of genuine native stock and not of continental origin.
- Ensure 'wildflowers' have been cultivated from legally collected seed and not dug up from the wild.
- Buy Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) accredited garden furniture and charcoal for barbecues.

# Lawns for wildlife

**The lawn is the focal point of many gardens. It's a place to let off steam or sit and relax, but it also provides a home for many insects that are eaten by birds and other wildlife.**

Lawns rich in organic matter are likely to have good numbers of earthworms – the staple winter and spring diet of song thrushes and much relished by blackbirds. They can also provide seed for birds – annual meadow grass, plantain, buttercup and dandelion are particular favourites.

Any patch of grass is a feeding area for birds. Longer grass helps retain humidity and soil moisture, providing favourable conditions for insect larvae and other soil invertebrates, particularly certain moth and butterfly caterpillars and craneflies. These provide protein for birds and are particularly important for the survival of chicks.

Providing areas of grass of different heights, which are cut at different times of the year, optimises food potential. Try to avoid using weedkillers and artificial fertilisers, which may harm wildlife.

**TIP** When you have decided on a designated meadow area, seed the lawn with a small amount of wildflower seed – approximately 20g per square metre should be sufficient for most soil types. Check with your supplier when ordering.

## LONGER GRASS

Lawns require plenty of light and benefit from an open aspect, but you can grow grass almost anywhere – even in a container on a terrace.

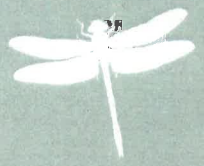
- A gentle slope to a lawn helps give it depth and drains surface water away from the house.
- Avoid straight lines – curved edges look more natural and, in south-facing borders, they create sheltered suntraps for insects.
- Maintain a formal, short-grass lawn at 3.5-5cm. In moist, warm summer weather, you may need to cut grass weekly, but in dry weather, try to cut it fortnightly to reduce drought stress and keep it green for longer.
- Cut areas of longer summer lawn until May, then allow them to grow until mid to late September. Mow, then rake off and compost cuttings, and maintain the height of the grass at 3.5-5cm for the remainder of the season.
- Areas of grass left longer in winter should be cut to 3.5-5cm in late March, then raked to remove cuttings.

*Unmown grassy areas offer frogs safe passage to and from the pond*

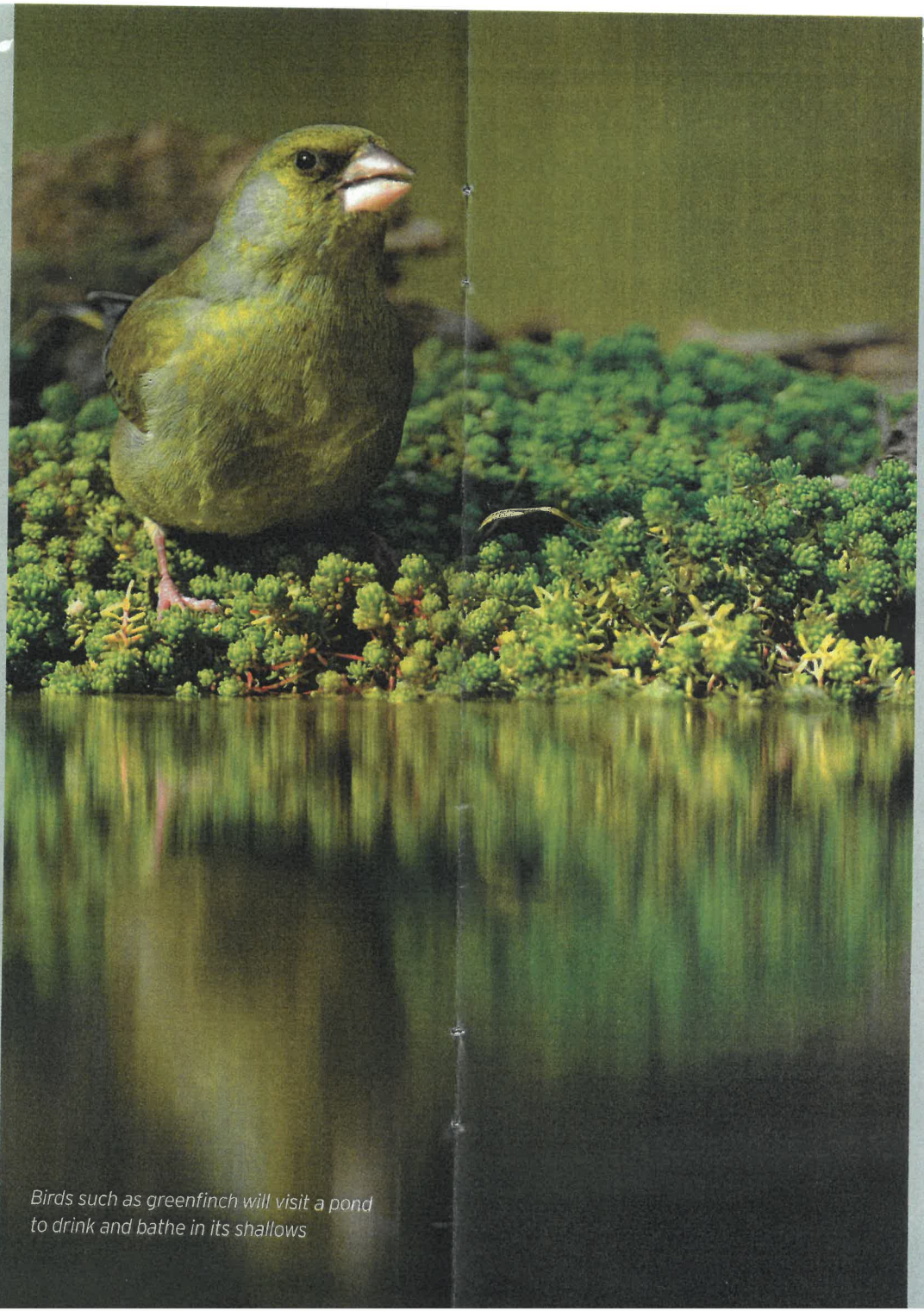
# Ponds for wildlife

**Almost any body of water, whatever its size, will have some wildlife value, even if only as a drinking place for birds. However, a well-designed and maintained pond is an indispensable wildlife habitat.**

- Ponds support a huge variety of invertebrates, from pond-skaters, water beetles and pond snails to freshwater mussels, harmless leeches, and many other species too small to be seen by the naked eye.
- Some common species of dragonfly and damselfly will breed in ponds. The larvae need shallow, sheltered water and submerged plants as cover and hunting habitat. They will eat other insects, fish fry and tadpoles and need taller plants to crawl up when they emerge as adults.
- Garden ponds are hugely important for frogs and, in general, amphibians and fish do not mix well because fish will eat tadpoles.
- Amphibians will use areas of dense vegetation adjacent to the pond as cover for moving in and out of the water. This is especially important to emerging froglets and toadlets, which can be harmed by lawnmowers. You can also provide logs and stones for shelter.
- Many small birds will drink and bathe in a small pond, but wetland species are only likely to breed on larger ponds. Put a branch or log in the middle of the pond so that they can drink and bathe in safety.







*Birds such as greenfinch will visit a pond to drink and bathe in its shallows*

## PLANNING A POND

Decide what wildlife you want to attract before digging your pond. Its position, size and shape, as well as the surrounding habitat, will affect its levels of appeal to different species.

- Frogs usually spawn in water 7-10cm deep among submerged plants. Newts lay single eggs on submerged plants usually within 30cm of the surface.
- Some dragonflies will breed in ponds with a surface area as small as 4sq m, but many species need a pond of more than 50sq m.
- Frogs and smooth newts may breed in ponds as small as 1sq m. Toads and great-crested newts prefer ponds larger than 15sq m.
- A pond should have gently sloping sides to provide shallow areas from which birds will drink and bathe, and amphibians will spawn. Sloping sides also allow wildlife such as hedgehogs to escape.
- Make sure your pond has some water deeper than 60cm so that it does not freeze solid in hard winters.
- Sunny sites are best for most wildlife, so try to make sure your pond has an open aspect to the south side.
- Low bushes near a pond are ideal, as they'll provide cover for bathing birds. But avoid siting a pond under mature trees as it will fill with autumn leaves, while roots can puncture the pond lining.

**TIP** It is often best to simply allow your pond to stock itself. You may be surprised just how rapidly insects, frogs and plants colonise.

# Dead wood for wildlife

**An important, but often overlooked, element of the garden is the provision of dead and decaying wood.**

Standing and fallen decaying wood and old plants are very important for wildlife. Even just one or two bushes, if kept beyond their natural life, are of great value to insects, fungi, mosses and lichens.

Birds feed on insects that make their home in old wood. In large gardens, a decaying tree with a snagged bough or a small cavity might provide a nest site for a bird or bat.

Dead branches also make excellent perches for birds.

*Decaying wood is a valuable habitat for moss, lichen and fungi such as common bonnet*

*A pile of unwanted wood left to rot in the undergrowth is a valuable wildlife home*

## CREATE A WOODPILE

- Leave dead trees, tree stumps and shrubs standing (as long as they are not in a dangerous place) to decompose naturally.
- Leave woody cuttings from trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants in piles within a shrub bed.
- It is best to not cut the wood into small pieces. Leave it in direct contact with the ground, in dappled shade and in compact piles to maintain humidity.
- Full sun will dry and heat the wood and it will support little life. Dense shade is good for fungi, but may be too cold for most insects.
- Avoid taking logs from woods and hedges as you will be removing the resource from its natural environment, along with any associated flora and fauna.
- Logs at least 10cm thick with the bark still attached provide the best wood. Hardwood trees such as ash, oak and beech are ideal, and birch logs can look particularly attractive. Be careful of freshly cut willow and poplar logs, as these can easily re-sprout if left lying on the ground.
- Allowing a climber to ramble over woodpiles, logs and stumps to cover them helps retain moisture.
- Lay logs on their sides to create a stack. Drive a stake into the ground either side of the pile to prevent them rolling.
- You can create standing dead wood by partially burying logs vertically in the ground to about 45-50cm depth. Use logs of different diameters and length and bury them side-by-side to form a pyramid. If space is limited, try a single log either on top of or buried in the soil.

**TIP** If you have no room for a woodpile, you can make one underground. Take an old 15-litre (3-gallon) bucket, drill some drainage holes in the base and lots of 3cm ones in the side, 5cm apart. Put some large stones in the bottom and then quarter-fill the bucket with garden soil and top with coarse hardwood chips. Completely bury the bucket in a hidden corner of the garden.

# Flower borders and herb gardens

**Flower borders and herb gardens can be extremely valuable for wildlife. They provide food and cover for many animals and act as a refuge for some wildflowers that are becoming rare in the countryside.**

When selecting plants, always check how big they will grow to ensure that they'll have enough room to flourish in the room available in your garden.

Also check how hardy a plant is – will it survive through drought conditions in a hot summer, for instance? Choose plants that are right for the conditions and soil type you have, whether that's well-drained soil in full sun or a moist, shady spot.

Ensure you have a mix of evergreen, deciduous, annual and perennial plants to keep the garden interesting – and attractive to wildlife – year-round.

## RECOMMENDED FLOWERING PLANTS

A good mix of blooms will keep your garden looking colourful throughout the seasons, and give insects and birds plenty of pollen, nectar and seed to feed on. Here are some plants you can try.

### ALYSSUM
*Alyssum spp*

There are more than 100 varieties of alyssum, which grow to form a rounded hummock with erect flower stems in early summer. Insects are drawn to the yellow-and-white blooms, while birds and some insects will eat the aphids that set up home on alyssum.

### SUNFLOWER
*Helianthus spp*

Sunflowers are a familiar sight of summer. There are family more than 80 varieties, but all are comparatively tall growing with large yellow flower heads, which are a favourite with bees. Some annual varieties, such as *H. annuus*, attract birds with their seeds.

### FLOWERING TOBACCO
*Nicotiana spp*

With some 70 varieties, including scented plants, nicotiana is hugely popular. Its white, pink, red or pale-green flowers attract bees, butterflies and moths for much of the summer. Less cultivated ornamental varieties such as *Nicotiana sylvestris* have delicate sprays on long stems, which draw long-tongued moths.

### CANDYTUFT
*Iberis spp*

Candytuft has more than 40 different varieties, and spreads to form hummocks with white, purple, red or pink flowers that are sometimes fragrant. Attractive to bees, butterflies and moths, candytuft is also a magnet for slugs, snails and caterpillars, all of which are eaten by a number of birds.

### MILLET
*Panicum*

Ornamental grasses such as millet provide a good source of seed food for birds. They are also good decorative plants, with leaves from light to dark green, purple or grey-green. Flowers grow in large showy panicles, rich with seeds that attract house sparrows.

### KNAPWEEDS
*Centaurea spp*

Centaurea's flower heads are distinctly spherical or hemispherical with tubular or lobed florets. Flowers can be mauve, pink, yellow or blue and are particularly attractive to bees, butterflies, moths and hoverflies.

**TIP** Choose a variety of plants that flower late or early in the season – such as lady's smock, chives and borage – to encourage bees into your garden throughout spring, summer and autumn.

# Shrubs

**Shrubs provide year-round colour, structure and interest in the garden and can support rich and varied wildlife.**

Shrub beds where plants form a dense, tight canopy make excellent wildlife havens with their own microclimates, particularly where species such as hawthorn, wild rose and bramble grow. Their thorns help protect wildlife from predators.

A shrub bed or hedge can provide an ever-changing display of flowers, catkins, autumn leaves, winter berries and stems.

## RECOMMENDED SHRUBS

A wide variety of shrubs provide food and a suitable habitat for wildlife. Here are a few recommended species for gardens.

**HAWTHORN**
*Crataegus monogyna*

Fast-growing, spiky hawthorn offers excellent protection for birds and mammals, and the berries are much sought after in autumn. It also provides food for caterpillars and aphids, which in turn are eaten by birds and other wildlife.

**FLOWERING CURRANT**
*Ribes sanguineum*

Deciduous, with fresh green aromatic leaves and a compact growth, the flowering currant is covered with loose spikes of reddish-pink or white flowers in April and produces dark purple berries in autumn. A good hedge plant, it offers dense cover for wildlife, and the sweet-smelling flowers are a source of early nectar for some pollinating insects.

**GOAT WILLOW**
*Salix caprea*

The goat willow's catkins are a good nectar source for bees in the spring. The leaves are eaten by many kinds of caterpillar and may support large numbers of aphids and sawflies. If you have only a small garden, try *S. caprea* 'Kilmarnock', which can be grown in a container.

# Climbers

**Climbers can grow over structures such as walls, fences, trees or even through a hedge, making them a good way of attracting wildlife where space is limited.**

There are three main types of climbing plant: those that ramble over a structure (including roses); those that entwine themselves around a structure (such as honeysuckle); and self-clinging plants (including ivy).

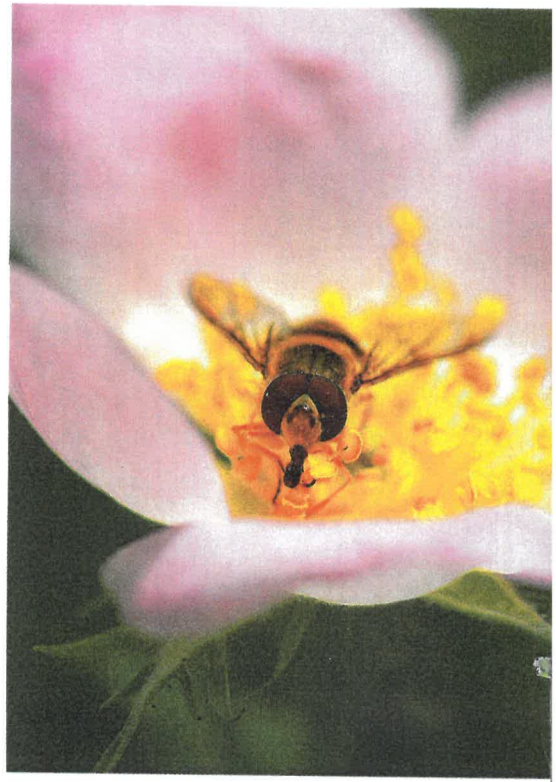
Even if you only have a balcony or patio, a pot-grown climber can be trained up a trellis or over a railing.

## RECOMMENDED CLIMBERS

Climbers can offer protection and insulation for the structure they cover, as well as for wildlife. Keep them trimmed so that they do not dislodge gutters and damage paintwork.

**HONEYSUCKLE**
*Lonicera periclymenum*

Honeysuckle flowers are strongly scented and occur in a variety of colours, from white and yellow, to hues of red, pink and orange. Wild honeysuckle flowers are white to yellow with a red flush. Autumn fruits, which vary in colour from red to dark purple or black, are a delicacy for warblers, thrushes and bullfinches.



**DOG ROSE**
*Rosa canina*

Beside the wild, native dog rose, there are numerous cultivated varieties. Flowers can be single or double, and colours range from whites and pinks to reds and yellows.

Roses attract aphids, which birds and insects eat, and climbing roses form a thick, impenetrable refuge for birds.

**TIP** Try to choose single varieties of rose, which are of higher nectar and pollen value to insects.

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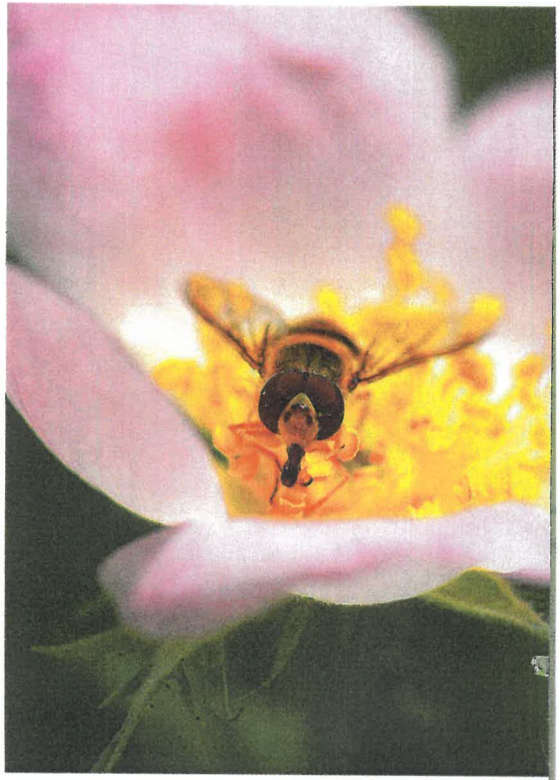

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IVY
*Hedera helix*

Evergreen ivy leaves come in three shapes: the familiar three-lobed type, a five-pointed or crested leaf and a rounded leaf. Ivy does not flower until mature and over a metre tall. Flowers, which appear from October onwards, provide nectar as late as December before producing purple-black fruit on which blackbirds and song thrushes feed.

A wall covered with mature ivy may harbour wren and even blackbird nests, as well as a host of hibernating creatures, including butterflies.

# Trees

**Trees give the main structure to a garden and provide wildlife with shelter, food and nesting sites. The size of your garden will determine the number and type of trees you can have, but most gardens can support at least one.**

Coniferous and deciduous trees bring different features to gardens – from year-round foliage in the case of the former, to the varieties of shape, leaf colour, flowers, fruits and seeds found in the latter.

## RECOMMENDED TREES

You could manage trees as a group, or as a specimen in a border, hedge or lawn.

BIRCH
*Betula spp*

Silver birch, *Betula pendula*, and downy birch, *B. pubescens*, are our two native varieties, which have distinctive catkin flowers from early spring. The tree's bark and young, fresh leaves attract insects which in turn, coupled with a prolific amount of seed, attract birds such as the great spotted woodpecker (below).

HOLLY
*Ilex aquifolium*

With more than 400 species, featuring either prickly, spiny, or smooth-edged leaves, it's easy to find the right holly for any garden. Most are evergreen, and the commonest varieties are *Ilex aquifolium*, and 'Golden King', *I. x altaclerensis*.

Birds such as robins (right) will eat the berries, and the holly is the foodplant for holly blue butterflies in spring.

ROWAN
*Sorbus aucuparia*

The sorbus family has more than 100 species of deciduous trees and shrubs. Leaves are ornate, and either pinnate or lobed. Some varieties of whitebeam have dark upper sides and pale grey-green undersides to their leaves. Many varieties are suitable for smaller gardens.

Blackbirds, starlings and mistle thrush (left) eat the berries, and chicks feed on the aphids and sawflies that live among the branches.

**TIP** Make use of limited space in a small garden by training a fruit tree such as apple, pear or plum along a south-facing wall or fence.

# Garden hedges

**Gardens need shelter from winds and may need screening for privacy – and a hedge provides excellent natural forms of both.**

While fences deflect the wind, they cause it to swirl down on the leeward side where it can damage plants.

Hedges allow the wind to pass through, but slow it down. For every foot of hedge height, there are 10 horizontal feet of shelter.

**TIP** Avoid cutting hedges and trees between March and August as this is the main breeding season for nesting birds.

## PLANNING A HEDGE

The best hedges contain several species that come into leaf, flower and fruit at different times. A mixed hedgerow of native species blends in with the surrounding countryside.

You can also plant a native hedge in urban areas, especially at the end of a garden to form a thorny, intruder-proof barrier.

The eventual height of the hedge is important in the choice of plants. For example, rosemary and lavender are only suited to hedges up to 60cm high, but hawthorn and beech can be maintained at 1-3m, or grown taller.

Small trees, such as rowan and crab apple, are also useful in a hedge. You can include them in a new hedge, or encourage a hawthorn or blackthorn to develop into a small tree in an established hedge.

*Plant hedges with several species of native shrub that fruit and flower at different times*

*If you haven't room for a vegetable plot in your garden, consider getting an allotment*

# Vegetable plots

**Vegetables benefit from the natural pest control provided by wildlife that you can encourage into your garden.**

Across a large plot, a beetle bank – a ridge of tussocky grass – provides a wintering site and refuge for predatory insects and spiders that are great natural pest controllers.

Erect bug-boxes to attract ladybirds and lacewings, which will eat less-welcome visitors, such as aphids.

## A PRODUCTIVE PATCH

Maximise the productivity of your plot and you'll be helping the environment and wildlife.

- Choose crops suited to the soil, location and season to reduce the need for fertilisers.
- Use the four-group rotation of potato, root, brassica, legume to improve soil quality.

**TIP** Plant companion species that deter nuisance insects such as aphids. For instance, nasturtiums will attract cabbage pests away from your crop.

- Use non-toxic slug and other pest control such as a 'bran barrier' around the plot to intercept slugs or spray aphids with a soapy water solution.
- If you have surplus crop, allow some of the produce to set seed, then collect seed to re-sow the following year. Try leaving some seed for birds to feed on over the winter.
- Save money by growing your own produce from seed germinated in trays of peat-free compost in a greenhouse or cold frame.
- Weed sparingly to reduce soil disturbance and minimise moisture loss.
- Grow clover in grass adjacent to your vegetable plot. The nectar will attract bees, which will pollinate your plants.

# Homes for wildlife

**The right plants and a good pond will encourage wildlife into your garden. And with a little know-how, you can give them a haven that they'll want to call home.**

## BATS

These are some species of bat you are likely to spot:

- Noctules are the biggest bats in Britain. They have long, narrow wings, and a high and straight flightpath.
- Daubenton's bats are medium-sized with a white underside. They often fly over water like tiny hovercraft. They have big feet to scoop insects from the surface.
- Pipistrelles are Britain's smallest species of bat, weighing the same as 10 paperclips. They look much bigger in flight and have a very erratic flightpath. They are the commonest bats seen in gardens and the most likely to use bat boxes.

*The pipistrelle is Britain's smallest bat*

**TIP** All bats are protected and should never be disturbed. If you find bats roosting in your loft, contact the Bat Conservation Trust (www.bats.org.uk).

*A bat box offers a safe roosting place*

### GET A BAT BOX

Bats are becoming increasingly rare in the UK, partly due to a loss of roost sites and a decline in insect-rich habitats. You can help these fascinating little mammals by making new roost sites for them.

Bats roost in a variety of places, including woodpecker holes, buildings, caves, mines and railway and canal tunnels.

Where natural roost sites are lost, bat boxes – similar to a bird's nestbox, but with a slit at the bottom rather than an entrance hole – can provide an alternative home.

Pipistrelles are most likely to use a bat box. Watch them leaving the box at dusk or look for other evidence of their presence, such as small, dry, crumbly droppings below it.

You can buy a bat box from around £15 at garden centres and from online suppliers including the RSPB, or make one yourself.

*Site hedgehog boxes out of the sun and wind*

## HEDGEHOGS

One of our most familiar garden mammals, hedgehogs are seldom seen during the day, their nocturnal wanderings take them through several gardens in the evening, where they feed on snails and slugs, beetles, caterpillars and worms.

In cold winter weather they will go into hibernation. Their nests may be quite large, usually made of mosses, grass, leaves and other garden debris. They can be found at the base of thick hedges, under thick bramble bushes, garden sheds or piles of rubbish.

You can encourage hedgehogs into your garden by including areas of thick, dense undergrowth and varying grass lengths.

### SET UP A HEDGEHOG BOX

Another way to encourage hedgehogs to spend more time in your garden is to provide them with a home.

You can purchase a ready-made box for around £20. It should be sited out of direct sunlight with the entrance facing away from prevailing winds, in or under thick vegetation or behind or under a shed.

It may take a year or more for the intended occupant to take up residence – or it may not happen at all if local conditions already offer adequate natural nesting sites.

**TIP** You can feed hedgehogs almost anything except milk and bread. Dog or cat food are particular favourites, but you can also try small amounts of cake, biscuits and pastry as well as fresh and dried fruits and cooked vegetables.

## INSECTS

Ladybirds, lacewings and hoverflies feed on aphids and other garden pests, as do bumblebees and wasps, which also help with pollinating plants around the garden.

You can provide all the right conditions for these insects to feed, breed and shelter naturally. Making or buying them a home can help them further and allow you the opportunity to watch them at close quarters.

*A hollow log, filled with bamboo and hogweed stems, is perfect for insect hibernation*

*Rolled-up cardboard in a plastic bottle – which hides well in a woodpile – attracts smaller insects*

### MAKE AN INSECT HOME

It's easy to provide a nesting place for insects using dried plant stems from the garden or recycling a few everyday household items.

- The hollow stems of bamboo or hogweed are an ideal natural resource. Bundle them together and pile them up in a hollow log (alternatively, you can simply drill lots of small holes in a log). If you don't have a log, tie the stems in a bundle with some garden wire or string and hang them in a tree or shrub, or fixed against a wall where it is warm but not too hot. Tilt the front slightly when hanging, so water can drain out. Put in place before the spring, ready for when bees start to emerge.
- Large plastic drinking straws are an artificial option. Secure a bundle with string or wire. Put them inside a large tin; this will block off one end so that they do not become miniature wind tunnels.
- For a recycled option, cut the bottom off a 1- or 2-litre, plastic drink bottle and place a 100cm rolled length of corrugated cardboard inside it. Use a thin piece of wire, pushed through both sides of the bottle's base, to hold the card in place. Tuck the bottle in a log pile or hang it among dense foliage in trees, bushes and on garden fences.

*To attract ladybirds to your garden, look for an insect box with a louvred front*

### READY-MADE INSECT HOMES

When purchasing a ready-made box (from around £10), ensure that the wood it is made from is sustainably sourced and Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) accredited.

- Some styles of ready-made bug boxes combine homes for ladybirds, lacewings and solitary bees with narrow, vertical roosting and hibernating slots. Some for ladybirds have a louvred front, behind which is a honeycomb of insulating material in which the ladybirds can shelter.

### INSECT-FRIENDLY GARDENING

Just leaving certain parts of your garden untouched over winter can provide hibernating and breeding sites for insects – with no effort at all on your part.

- As long as there is no structural risk, leave small holes in the mortar between bricks.
- Retain dead vegetation and autumn leaf litter, and create a log pile.
- Solitary bees and wasps like to burrow in dry sunny banks or warm patches of bare earth in a lawn or border. If you have a south-facing embankment keep part of it free of dense vegetation.

*Solitary bees will hibernate in insect boxes, but also like natural areas of bare, dry earth*

# Homes for birds

You can encourage birds into your garden by providing plenty of places to nest. A nestbox is an excellent substitute for a tree hole and many different species will use one. The species you attract will depend on the location, the type of box and the size of the entrance hole.

Put the box in a quiet place out of the reach of cats, generally between 2-5m up a tree, fence or wall. Try to face it between north and east, as this avoids strong sunlight and the wettest winds. Tilt the box forward slightly so that driving rain hits the roof and does not enter the box.

Put different types of box in different places around the garden. For instance, site open-fronted nestboxes low down and hide them well in vegetation to attract robins and wrens.

It is important to clean out nestboxes every year during the winter to prevent a build-up of debris and remove parasites such as fleas. If you put in a handful of clean hay or wood shavings, birds may use it as a winter roost.

Nestboxes are available from around £15 from your local garden centre and via mail order companies as well as the RSPB. But if you're handy with a saw and drill, why not make one yourself? Check online for instructions.

# Feeding birds

**More than half of adults in the UK feed birds in their garden, providing supplementary food that helps them overcome periods of natural food shortage, survive severe winter weather and come into good breeding condition in the spring.**

- Bird tables are suitable for many species and most foods. A simple tray is perfectly adequate, with or without a roof. It needs a raised rim to retain the food and a gap at each corner to let rainwater drain and allow you to clean away droppings and uneaten food. The simpler the design, the better.
- Nut feeders made of steel mesh are the only safe method of offering nuts to wild birds. The mesh size should be about 6mm – large enough to prevent beak damage and small enough to stop large pieces of nut from being removed.
- Seed feeders are tubular transparent containers with holes, through which birds are able to access the seed. These are designed for sunflower seeds and seed mixes labelled 'feeder seed'. They will attract sparrows, tits, siskins and greenfinches.
- Seed hoppers are excellent for smaller seed such as nyjer, which is particularly popular with goldfinches and siskins.
- Trays or flat surfaces are suited to general cereal-based mixes, although any seed mix can be used. They will attract a similar range of birds as a bird table.
- Half coconuts and tit bells filled with fat or bird cake can be hung from a bird table, tree or wall bracket. They will attract greenfinches, house sparrows and tits.

*Seed mixtures should contain plenty of flaked maize, sunflower seeds and peanut granules*

# A-Z of garden wildlife

**A balanced wildlife garden needs its share of seasonal pollinators, pests and predators.**

Some of these creatures merely visit at certain times of year; others will take up residence in a quiet shady woodpile, in the vines of an evergreen creeper or under a stone in a pond.

If you provide the right mix of food, shelter and water you should find many of these birds, mammals, insects, amphibians and invertebrates across your garden, and each has an important role in the foodchain.

APHID

*Aphis fabae* (blackfly, black bean aphid – above – black aphid), *Macrosiphum rosae* (greenfly, rose aphid)

**Length** up to 3mm.

**What they eat** Plant sap from flowerbuds, leaves and stems.

**When to see them** Spring, summer and early autumn on stems, leaves and flowerbuds. Often seen on roses, vegetables and nasturtiums.

BLACKBIRD

*Turdus merula*

**Length** 24cm.

**What they eat** Insects, larvae worms and berries.

**When to see them** All year, often foraging at ground level.

BADGER

*Meles meles*

**Length** 75cm.

**What they eat** Earthworms, frogs, rodents, birds, eggs, lizards, insects, bulbs, seeds and berries.

**When to see them** During the night at any time of year, wandering through the garden, foraging for food.

BLACK GARDEN ANT

*Lasius niger*

**Length** 3-5mm.

**What they eat** Anything, especially if sweet. These ants 'milk' (stroke) aphids for their honeydew.

**When to see them** During the summer months throughout the garden, but often in paving cracks. Flying ants can be seen in July and August.

BLUE TIT

*Cyanistes caeruleus*

**Length** 12cm.

**What they eat** Insects, caterpillars, seeds and nuts.

**When to see them** All year throughout the garden, especially on low branches and in hedges.

CHAFFINCH

*Fringilla coelebs*

**Length** 14cm.

**What they eat** Insects and seeds.

**When to see them** All year, at the bird table, feeding on sunflower hearts, mixed seed and peanuts.

CLICK BEETLE

*Athous haemorrhoidalis*

**Length** 1cm.

**What they eat** Pollen, nectar, grasses and flowers.

**When to see them** Between May and July in flower border or herb garden, in hedges and on the lawn.

BUFF-TAILED BUMBLEBEE

*Bombus terrestris*

**Length** 2-3.5cm.

**What they eat** Nectar and pollen.

**When to see them** From spring until late autumn – though some species emerge as early as February – collecting pollen and nectar from flowers.

CINNABAR MOTH

*Tyria jacobaeae*

**Wingspan** 3.5-4.5cm.

**What they eat** Nectar.

**When to see them** From May to July, throughout the garden.

COCKCHAFER

*Melolontha melolontha*

**Length** up to 3cm.

**What they eat** Flowers and leaves.

**When to see them** Humming loudly around the garden on late spring evenings, often crashing noisily into lit windows.

COMMON BLUE DAMSELFLY
*Enallagma cyathigerum*

**Length** 3.2cm, wingspan 4cm.

**What they eat** Insects.

**When to see them** Between May and September, resting on vegetation near water. Drifting through the air. Flying along hedgerows.

COMMON DARTER
*Sympetrum striolatum*

**Length** 3.8-4.3cm.

**What they eat** These dragonflies eat just about anything they can catch, mainly flying insects.

**When to see them** From mid-June to November, particularly near water.

COMMON NEWT
*Triturus vulgaris*

**Length** 10cm.

**What they eat** Insects, slugs and worms, tadpoles, water snails and small crustaceans, such as shrimps.

**When to see them** Spring and summer in and around the pond and bog garden.

COMMON BLUE BUTTERFLY
*Polyommatus icarus*

**Wingspan** 3cm.

**What they eat** Nectar from flat-headed flowers.

**When to see them** From May to September, basking in the sunshine in areas of long grass.

COMMON FROG
*Rana temporaria*

**Length** 6-10cm.

**What they eat** Adults eat insects that they catch with their long, sticky tongue, as well as snails, slugs and worms. Young tadpoles feed on algae.

**When to see them** From February to October, by the pond, or in damp, sheltered areas.

COMMON TOAD
*Bufo bufo*

**Length** 15cm.

**What they eat** Insect larvae, spiders, slugs and worms, small grass snakes and harvest mice.

**When to see them** From April to October, usually at night in and around the pond during the breeding season. Sometimes in damp parts of the garden.

CRANEFLY
*Tipula paludosa*

**Length** 2.5cm.

**What they eat** Adults rarely feed. Larvae live in the soil and eat roots. They also emerge at night to chew the bases of plant stems.

**When to see them** Any time of year, but it is most common in the autumn. Often attracted to lights in the evening.

EARWIG
*Forficula auricularia*

**Length** up to 1.5cm.

**What they eat** Plant matter, flowers, carrion and insects.

**When to see them** Spring, summer and autumn throughout the garden hiding in dark places, such as under pots. They also hide in flowers.

FROGHOPPER
*Philaenus spumarius*

**Length** 6mm.

**What they eat** Plant sap.

**When to see them** From June to September on woody and herbaceous plants. Their larvae are more commonly seen coated in a mass of froth – or cuckoo spit – on plant stems.

EARTHWORM
*Lumbricus terrestris*

**Length** up to 30cm.

**What they eat** Decaying organic matter.

**When to see them** All year, in soil. Sometimes at night, in damp weather, visible on the lawn and in its borders.

FOX
*Vulpes vulpes*

**Shoulder height** 40cm.

**What they eat** Anything they can find, from insects, earthworms and berries to birds, small mammals, carrion and scraps left by people.

**When to see them** At dusk and night all year round searching for food. Often near dustbins in urban places.

GARDEN SNAIL
*Helix aspersa*

**Shell diameter** up to 4cm.

**What they eat** Leaves, algae, lichens, fungi and rotting plant debris.

**When to see them** Throughout the garden in spring, summer and autumn. Most active in warm, damp weather, especially at night.

GARDEN SPIDER
*Araneus diadematus*

**Length** 4-8 mm (male), 1-1.3cm (female).

**What they eat** Flying insects such as butterflies, wasps and flies.

**When to see them** From May until November. Most obvious in late summer and autumn on bushes and vegetation.

GOLDFINCH
*Carduelis carduelis*

**Length** 12cm.

**What they eat** Seeds and insects in summer.

**When to see them** All year in bushes and trees, on rough ground with thistles.

GREEN SHIELD BUG
*Palomena prasina*

**Length** 1-1.5cm.

**What they eat** Plant sap and leaves of trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants.

**When to see them** Spring, summer and autumn in flower border/herb gardens, trees and hedges.

GARDEN TIGER MOTH
*Arctia caja*

**Wingspan** 2.8-3.7cm.

**What they eat** Nectar.

**When to see them** From June to August, drinking nectar from flowers.

GREAT TIT
*Parus major*

**Length** 14cm.

**What they eat** Insects, seeds and nuts.

**When to see them** All year throughout the garden, especially at the bird table.

GREY SQUIRREL
*Sciurus carolinensis*

**Length** 30cm, tail 25cm.

**What they eat** Acorns, bulbs, tree shoots, buds, fungi, nuts and roots. Occasionally takes birds' eggs and chicks.

**When to see them** All year, throughout the garden, especially on peanut feeders.

HARVESTMAN
*Phalangium opilio*

**Length** 5-7mm.

**What they eat** Small insects, snails and worms.

**When to see them** Autumn, throughout the garden. Sometimes in the house.

HOLLY BLUE BUTTERFLY
*Celastrina argiolus*

**Wingspan** 3cm.

**What they eat** Adults drink oozing sap, aphid honeydew and carrion juices.

**When to see them** Between April and June, then August and September in gardens, near the tops of bushes, basking in sunshine with shut wings.

HORNET
*Vespa crabro*

**Length** up to 2.5cm (workers).

**What they eat** Mainly insects, including spiders, and queens may supplement their diet with tree sap and windfall fruit.

**When to see them** From May to September, throughout the garden.

HEDGEHOG
*Erinaceus europaeus*

**Length** 22cm.

**What they eat** Slugs, snails, beetles and earthworms, birds' eggs, nestlings and carrion.

**When to see them** At night from April to October throughout the garden foraging for food. They will also come on to patios and to the back door if food is put out.

HONEY BEE
*Apis mellifera*

**Length** 1.5cm.

**What they eat** Nectar and pollen.

**When to see them** From spring until late autumn throughout the garden collecting pollen and nectar from a variety of flowers.

HOUSE MOUSE
*Mus musculus*

**Length** body and tail up to 10cm each.

**What they eat** Grain, seeds, roots, fungi and insects – and inside the house they seem to eat almost anything!

**When to see them** All year, around log piles, outbuildings, patio pots; sometimes in the house.

HUMMINGBIRD HAWK MOTH
*Macroglossum stellatarum*

**Wingspan** 5cm.

**What they eat** Nectar from flowers, such as honeysuckle and buddleia.

**When to see them** Summer, hovering and probing nectar-rich flowers.

LADYBIRD
*Cocinella septempunctata* (seven-spot)

**Length** 6-8mm.

**What they eat** Aphids and small insects.

**When to see them** From early spring until autumn, throughout the garden.

LARGE SKIPPER BUTTERFLY
*Ochlodes sylvanus*

**Wingspan** 2.9-3.6cm.

**What they eat** Nectar from flowers; favourites include bramble.

**When to see them** Flitting about on sunny days between early June and mid-August in grassy places where flowers grow.

LACEWING
*Chrysoperla carnea* (green lacewing, above), *Osymlus fulvicephalus* (giant lacewing)

**Length** 1cm.

**What they eat** Aphids and other small insect, and nectar.

**When to see them** Generally at night (but also by day) from May to August in the garden and, often, in the house.

LARGE RED DAMSELFLY
*Pyrrhosoma nymphula*

**Length** up to 3.6cm, wingspan up to 4.8cm.

**What they eat** Small insects.

**When to see them** April to September resting on vegetation near water.

LARGE WHITE BUTTERFLY
*Pieris brassicae*

**Wingspan** 5.8-6.3cm.

**What they eat** Nectar.

**When to see them** From April to October on flowers.

MAGPIE MOTH
*Abraxas grossulariata*

**Wingspan** 4cm.

**What they eat** Nectar.

**When to see them** From June to August on plants and flowers.

MOLE
*Talpa europaea*

**Length** up to 16cm.

**What they eat** Earthworms and insect larvae. Sometimes also lizards and tiny snakes.

**When to see them** Rarely seen above ground. Molehills usually appear in the spring, summer and autumn throughout the garden, especially on lawns.

PAINTED LADY BUTTERFLY
*Cynthia cardui*

**Wingspan** 5.8-7.4cm.

**What they eat** Nectar.

**When to see them** From May to October on buddleia, or basking in the sunshine.

MIGRANT HAWKER
*Aeshna mixta*

**Length** 6.3cm.

**What they eat** Insects caught on the wing.

**When to see them** The first adults emerge in the second half of July and can be found into November. Peak numbers occur in August and September.

ORANGE-TIP BUTTERFLY
*Anthocharis cardamines*

**Wingspan** 4.5cm.

**What they eat** Nectar.

**When to see them** From April to June, flying along hedges and across the garden.

PEACOCK BUTTERFLY
*Inachis io*

**Wingspan** 5.5cm.

**What they eat** Nectar from flowers – favourites include buddleia and lavender.

**When to see them** Feeding on a variety of flowers on any sunny day, sometimes even in winter, but most likely between March and May, and from July to September.

PIPISTRELLE BAT
*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*

**Length** up to 5cm, wingspan 30cm

**What they eat** Small insects, such as moths and gnats. A single pipistrelle can eat 3,000 gnats in one night.

**When to see them** From April to September, flying throughout the garden at night.

RABBIT
*Oryctolagus cuniculus*

**Length** up to 40cm.

**What they eat** Leaves and shoots of vegetation, including crops. In winter, grass, bulbs and bark.

**When to see them** Throughout the garden all year round, most often at night and especially on the lawn.

ROBIN
*Erithacus rubecula*

**Length** 14cm.

**What they eat** Worms, seeds, fruits and insects.

**When to see them** All year, throughout the garden.

POND SKATER
*Gerris lacustris*

**Length** 1.5cm.

**What they eat** Small insects.

**When to see them** On ponds from early spring until autumn.

RED ADMIRAL
*Vanessa atalanta*

**Wingspan** 4.5-6cm.

**What they eat** Nectar, especially from buddleia, and rotting fruit in autumn.

**When to see them** From May to October, feeding on flowers, basking in the sunshine.

SILVER Y MOTH
*Autographa gamma*

**Wingspan** 4cm.

**What they eat** Nectar.

**When to see them** Usually in spring and summer on nectar-rich plants.

SLUG
*Arion hortensis (garden slug), Limax maximus (great grey slug, pictured), Arion ater (large black slug)*

**Length** garden slug up to 3cm, great grey up to 20cm, large black up to 10cm.

**What they eat** Plant leaves, stems and roots, decaying matter, fungi and earthworms.

**When to see them** Spring, summer and autumn throughout the garden, especially at night.

SMALL TORTOISESHELL BUTTERFLY
*Aglais urticae*

**Wingspan** 5cm.

**What they eat** Nectar – particularly buddleia.

**When to see them** From March to October, feeding on a variety of flowers, basking in the sunshine.

SPECKLED WOOD BUTTERFLY
*Pararge aegeria*

**Wingspan** 4cm.

**What they eat** Aphid honeydew. Seen on flowers early and late in the year when there are few aphids.

**When to see them** From March to October in areas of dappled shade, perched in sunlit spots on the ground or on leaves. Also in open woods, tall hedgerows and scrub.

SMALL SKIPPER BUTTERFLY
*Thymelicus sylvestris*

**Wingspan** 2.7-3.4cm.

**What they eat** Nectar.

**When to see them** From the last week of June to around the first week of August, feeding on flowers.

SPECKLED BUSH CRICKET
*Leptophyes punctatissima*

**Length** 1-2cm.

**What they eat** Leaves and flowers of a variety of plants.

**When to see them** August to late October, often found perched on bushes or flowers in hedges.

STARLING
*Sturnus vulgaris*

**Length** 22cm.

**What they eat** Insects and fruit.

**When to see them** All year, throughout the garden. Large numbers arrive in autumn to overwinter here.

VIOLET GROUND BEETLE
*Carabus violaceus*

**Length** up to 3.5cm.

**What they eat** Slugs, snails, worms and insects.

**When to see them** All year in the garden at night; under logs and stones during the day.

WATER BOATMAN
*Corixa punctata*

**Length** up to 1.2cm.

**What they eat** Plant debris and algae.

**When to see them** Throughout the year in the pond. Sometimes flying during warm weather.

WASP
*Vespula vulgaris*

**Length** 1.5cm (workers).

**What they eat** Sugary liquid secreted by wasp larvae, nectar and windfall fruit.

**When to see them** From late spring until early autumn. Most common in late summer throughout the garden.

WOODPIGEON
*Columba palumbus*

**Length** 40-42cm.

**What they eat** Crops like cabbages, sprouts, peas and grain. Also buds, shoots, seeds, nuts and berries.

**When to see them** All year on lawns or roosting high up in trees.

Images: Alamy, Getty, RSPB Images.



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A simple **step for nature.**

**This weekend, sit back and relax with a cuppa and watch the birds in your garden for an hour. Tell us what you have seen and that's it!**

big garden BIRDWATCH

Take part this weekend

Visit www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch for details and quote BW22

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